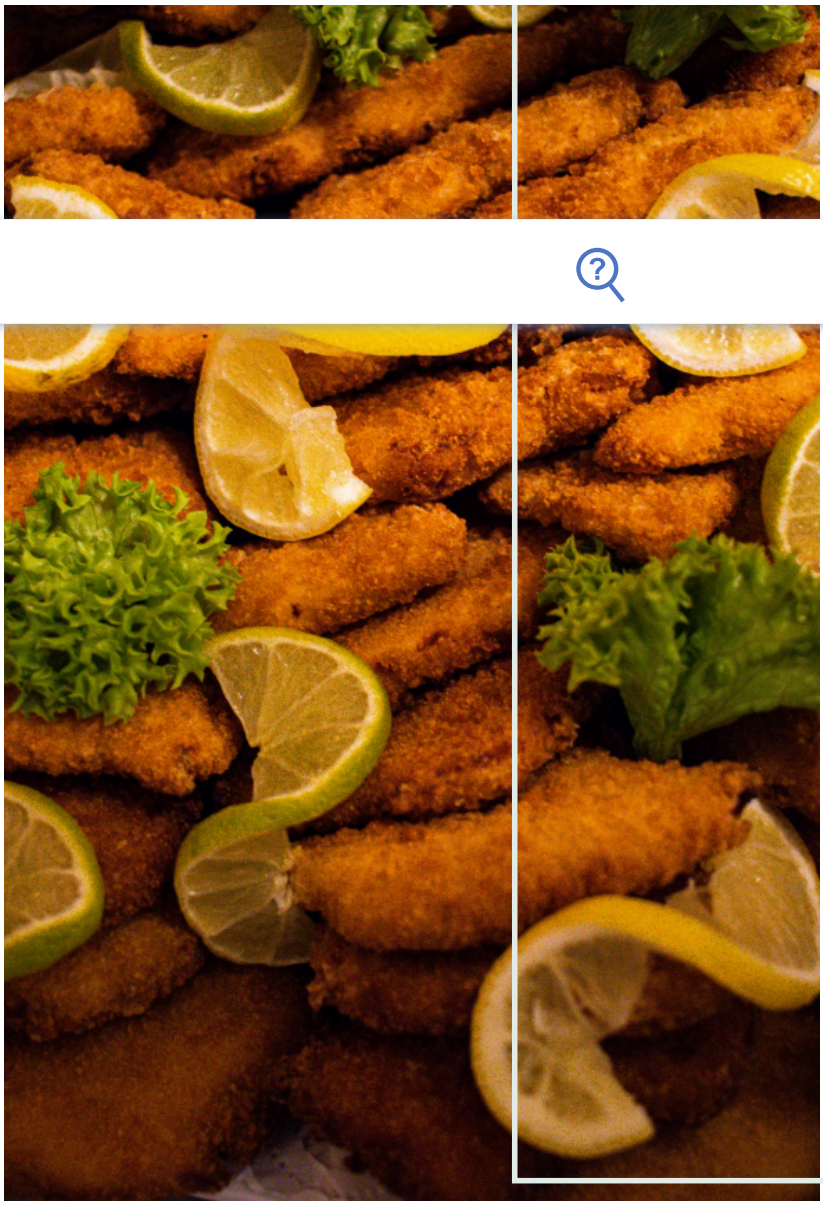
Best Food in Germany: 21 Top Traditional Dishes You Need to Try

by Jason Brasier | 3 Jun 2025

When you think of the best food in Germany, what comes to mind? Sausages sizzling at a Christmas market, golden schnitzels on a cosy plate, or perhaps the sweetness of a perfect apple strudel?. Trips to Germany promise a food culture that is hearty, diverse, and a blend of time-honoured traditions and modern twists, reflecting the country's regional diversity and history. From Sauerbraten, considered the national dish of Germany, to the bold spices of Currywurst, the variety is as rich as the flavors themselves. So get ready to discover new flavors and get a taste of what's waiting with this guide to the best food in Germany.

1. Schnitzel

A golden, crispy schnitzel is a must-try in Germany. While it originated in Austria, the German version—typically made with pork or veal—is beloved across the country and a staple in beer gardens and restaurants alike. The simplicity of schnitzel is part of its charm: a satisfying crunch, a burst of citrus from the lemon, and a plate that feels both indulgent and accessible. For travelers, it's a comforting entry point into German cuisine—familiar yet distinctly local. You'll find regional variations, too: in Bavaria, you might enjoy it alongside Bratkartoffeln (German fries), while in northern Germany, it could arrive with herring or mustard sauce.



2. Kartoffelsalat

Schnitzel is classically served with a lemon wedge and kartoffelsalat. At first glance, this potato salad might seem like a simple side—but in Germany, it's a dish that inspires fierce regional pride and endless debate. Some recipes are creamy with mayonnaise, while others lean sharp with vinegar and mustard. In the south, kartoffelsalat often has a warm, vinegary tang, while in the north, it tends to be creamy and rich. However you make it, one thing's for sure: no barbecue, picnic, or family dinner is complete without it.

Kartoffelsalat is the ultimate sidekick for many of the best food in Germany—from bratwurst to schnitzel. It's a dish that feels familiar yet surprising, with each version telling a different regional story. Try it at a market stall with a sausage in

3. Bratwurst and Currywurst

Germany's love affair with sausages is legendary, and bratwurst is at the heart of it all. Whether grilled over charcoal or simmered in beer, it's a simple pleasure best enjoyed outdoors with a dollop of mustard. In Berlin, you'll find currywurst—a post-war invention of sausage smothered in tangy curry ketchup. It's messy, spicy, and utterly delicious.

Beyond the classic versions, sausage culture in Germany is remarkably regional. In Thuringia, you'll find bratwurst with a finer grind, while in Franconia, it's all about pork and marjoram. Exploring these variations is like a culinary road trip through Germany's heartland.

For more on sausage traditions, check out this article on Oktoberfest food origins.

4. Sauerbraten

When it comes to the national dish of Germany, sauerbraten often tops the list. This slow-cooked pot roast is marinated for days in vinegar, wine, and spices, then braised to melt-in-your-mouth perfection. It's a dish that tells a story of patience and craftsmanship, served with red cabbage and kartoffelklöße (potato dumplings) for a truly comforting meal. Sauerbraten isn't just a meal—it's a tradition. Families pass down marinade recipes, and debates rage over the perfect side dish to go with it. You'll find it both in a rustic tavern or a fine-dining restaurant.

5. Kartoffelklöße

Kartoffelklöße—also known as potato dumplings—are a beloved side dish that appears on plates across Germany, especially in the south. Made from starchy potatoes, eggs, and sometimes a touch of flour, these dumplings are soft, fluffy, and the perfect partner for rich, saucy mains like sauerbraten or rouladen. Their delicate texture soaks up gravies beautifully, turning every bite into a satisfying, comforting mouthful. Like much of German cuisine, kartoffelklöße vary by region. In Thuringia, for example, the dumplings are often a 50-50 mix of raw and cooked potatoes, giving them a firmer texture. In Bavaria, they tend to be softer and creamier.

6. Himmel und Erde

Himmel und Erde, which translates to "heaven and earth," is a classic dish from the Rhineland that brings together mashed potatoes (the "earth") and stewed apples (the "heaven"). Served alongside slices of black pudding and crispy onions, it's a hearty, rustic dish that perfectly captures Germany's love for simple, comforting flavors that satisfy the soul.

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7. Saumagen

Often called "Palatinate's national dish," saumagen is a hearty speciality made from pork and potatoes, stuffed into a pig's stomach casing and slowly cooked. Don't let the description deter you—it's a rich, savoury dish with subtle spice that reflects the resourceful nature of German cuisine. Best enjoyed with sauerkraut and mashed potatoes, saumagen is a dish that's both bold and beloved.

8. Pinkel mit Grünkohl

Pinkel mit Grünkohl is a true winter classic from northern Germany. It pairs smoked sausage (pinkel) with stewed kale (grünkohl), potatoes, and mustard. Rich, smoky, and warming, it's traditionally served after long winter walks and is a must-try for those looking to experience hearty German fare at its best.

Want to taste these dishes for yourself? Try our Best of Germany tour, exploring different German regions and their culinary delights along the way

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9-11. Comfort Food Classics: Eintopf, Käsespätzle and Maultaschen

German cuisine is all about warming the soul, and dishes like eintopf—a one-pot stew that varies by region—do just that. In Swabia, käsespätzle (soft egg noodles with melted cheese and crispy onions) is a must, while maultaschen, the German dumpling, is often enjoyed in broth or pan-fried.

Eintopf

Eintopf is Germany's answer to the universal craving for a hearty, warming stew. A one-pot wonder, it combines meat (often sausage or beef), seasonal vegetables, and pulses like lentils or beans. Each region has its own twist: in North

Käsespätzle

A hearty plate of käsespätzle is pure alpine comfort. These soft egg noodles are tossed in melted cheese—often Emmental or Gruyère—and finished with crispy fried onions for a bit of crunch. Served piping hot, käsespätzle is Germany's answer to mac and cheese, but with a distinctly Bavarian flair. It's rich, filling, and perfect for refuelling after a day of exploring the mountains or wandering a wintry city square.

Käsespätzle is not just a side—it's a dish in its own right. You'll find it on menus throughout southern Germany, often alongside a refreshing local beer or glass of white wine. The simplicity of its ingredients is part of its charm: flour, eggs, milk, cheese, and onions—humble pantry staples transformed into something irresistible.

Maultaschen

Think of maultaschen as Germany's answer to ravioli. These large, square dumplings are filled with minced meat, spinach, breadcrumbs, and herbs, then folded like a parcel and either simmered in broth or pan-fried until golden. Their origins lie in Swabia, where legend has it that monks created the dish to hide meat from the eyes of God during Lent. Whether or not the story is true, maultaschen have earned a loyal following across the country. Served with a sprinkle of chives or a pat of butter, Maultaschen are a warm, savoury delight that feels both comforting and celebratory. In southern Germany, they're often the star of the table during family gatherings and holidays. Pair them with a crisp salad or a glass of regional wine for a true taste of Swabian food culture.

Döner Kebab

While not traditionally German, Döner kebab has become an essential part of Germany's food scene, especially in cities like Berlin, where it's practically a local institution. Introduced by Turkish immigrants in the 1970s, the dish features spiced, rotisserie-cooked meat shaved into thin slices and served in flatbread with fresh salad, creamy sauces, and a hint of spice.

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12-14. Sweet Treats: Apfelstrudel, Schwarzwälder Kirschtorte, and Spaghettieis

No guide to the best food in Germany is complete without dessert. Apfelstrudel—layers of spiced apple, raisins, and flaky pastry—is a classic you'll find everywhere. Meanwhile, the decadent Schwarzwälder Kirschtorte (Black Forest gateau) combines chocolate, cream, and cherries for an unforgettable cake. And for a playful twist, try spaghettieis: a plate of vanilla ice cream shaped to look like spaghetti, drizzled with strawberry sauce and white chocolate shavings.

This beloved dish has roots in the Austro-Hungarian Empire but has become a staple in German cafés and homes alike. It's a reminder that some of the best food in Germany is shared across cultures and borders, shaped by history as much as by taste.

Schwarzwälder Kirschtorte: The Black Forest Delight

Schwarzwälder Kirschtorte, or Black Forest cake, is a showstopper. This towering dessert layers chocolate sponge, whipped cream, and cherries, all infused with a generous splash of cherry schnapps (Kirschwasser). The combination of rich chocolate and tart cherries is irresistible, and the presentation—often adorned with chocolate shavings and bright red cherries—makes it a showstopper on any dessert table.

Black Forest cake is a symbol of celebration in Germany, enjoyed at birthday parties, weddings, and found in cafés in the heart of the Black Forest. It's a reminder of Germany's love for desserts that delight the senses. Served with a strong coffee or as part of a traditional Kaffee und Kuchen ritual, it's an experience as much as a dish.

Spaghettieis

Spaghettieis is a playful dessert that's been delighting sweet-toothed locals and visitors since the 1960s. This unique treat looks like a plate of spaghetti, but it's actually vanilla ice cream pressed through a potato ricer to create thin strands that resemble pasta. It's then topped with strawberry sauce to mimic tomato, and a sprinkle of grated white chocolate to look like Parmesan. The result is a charming, whimsical dish that's as much fun to eat as it is to look at.

Spaghettieis is a must-try, especially during the warmer months when ice cream parlours are at their busiest. It's a reminder that German cuisine can be surprising and playful, blending nostalgia with a touch of humor.

19-21. Sweet Treats at German Christmas Markets

When it comes to German desserts, we can't go without mentioning its Christmas markets. These festive fairs are as much about the food as they are about the twinkling lights and festive atmosphere—and when it comes to sweets, they deliver in spades. Here's what you'll want to try.

Lebkuchen

Lebkuchen is one of the most iconic treats of the German Christmas season. Soft, spiced, and sometimes dipped in chocolate or glazed with sugar, these gingerbread-like biscuits often take on heart-shaped forms decorated with colourful icing and playful messages. Found at markets and bakeries alike, Lebkuchen offers a perfect blend of sweetness, spice, and nostalgia.

Stollen

Stollen is a dense, buttery fruit bread that's synonymous with German Christmas traditions. Packed with raisins, candied peel, and often a ribbon of marzipan through the centre, it's dusted with powdered sugar to resemble a snowy coating. It is a rich, satisfying treat that's usually enjoyed in thin slices with a cup of coffee.

Gebrannte Mandeln

No trip to a German Christmas market is complete without a paper cone of Gebrannte Mandeln—warm, sugar-coated almonds that fill the air with the irresistible scent of caramel and spice. Each bite is a perfect balance of crunch and sweetness, making these almonds a must-try for any festive wanderer.

Schmalzkuchen

Schmalzkuchen are small, golden doughnut bites that are fried to perfection and dusted with powdered sugar. Served warm and eaten straight from a paper bag, they're a market favorite during the colder months—sweet, slightly crisp on the outside, and wonderfully soft inside.

Mutzenmandeln

A close cousin to schmalzkuchen, mutzenmandeln are almond-shaped fried biscuits with a crunchy exterior and soft, cakey centre. Lightly sweetened and dusted with powdered sugar, they're especially popular at Christmas markets, offering a bite-sized treat to enjoy while wandering among the festive stalls.

Reibekuchen with Applesauce

While reibekuchen are technically savory—crispy, pan-fried potato pancakes—their classic pairing with sweet applesauce gives them a delightful twist. This balance of salty and sweet makes them a standout at Christmas markets, where the scent of sizzling pancakes mingles with spiced cider and roasting nuts.

Candied Fruits

For a simple yet indulgent market snack, look no further than candied fruits. Apples, grapes, bananas, and strawberries are dipped in glistening caramel or smooth chocolate, offering a juicy burst of sweetness in every bite. Their glossy coating catches the light—an edible decoration that tastes as good as it looks.

These treats make Christmas markets in Germany an essential part of any festive foodie itinerary—especially if you've got a sweet tooth.

Read up on Festive Foods to Try at Christmas Markets from all over Europe

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What is the National Dish of Germany?

The national dish of Germany is often considered to be sauerbraten, a tender pot roast that's marinated in vinegar and spices for days before being slow-cooked. It's a dish that symbolises Germany's love of hearty, comforting meals that bring people together. Other contenders include bratwurst and schnitzel, but sauerbraten remains the classic choice.

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Is Germany Vegetarian and Vegan Friendly?

Absolutely. While traditional German cuisine leans towards meat, there are plenty of plant-based options. Many dishes—like käsespätzle, eintopf, and even kartoffelsalat—can be vegetarian. Germany's cities, in particular, have embraced vegetarian and vegan food culture.

Read more on our guide on vegetarian to dining in Europe

What is a Typical German Breakfast?

A typical German breakfast is a spread of brot (bread), brötchen (bread rolls), cold cuts, cheeses, jams, and boiled eggs—often enjoyed with strong coffee. In many regions, kaffee und kuchen (coffee and cake) later in the day is a beloved tradition too.

ABOUT JASON BRASIER

I'm Jay – born in Italy, raised in South London. Having French sisters and Hungarian ancestors, I've always been fascinated with the world and its cultures, and I carry this curiosity into my writing for Insightful. My favourite destinations I've traveled to so far have been Italy, Peru, France and Brazil.

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